

An Ante-Homily

I am writing this on Thursday morning to gather preliminary ideas for when Geoff and I have a conversation later today in which we will share "some thoughts". Geoff had to rush off on Wednesday to visit his brother, whose wife died.

If you have the time, I suggest that you read in the liturgy the words of the song, "if you had a vineyard". Sinead O'Connor is following fairly closely a passage from the book of Isaiah. But she has in mind the conflict in Israel/Palestine caused by the Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Israelis are encroaching on Palestinian land captured in the 1967 war.

I chose to use this song because it captures some of the feelings expressed in the parable we hear in Matthew's Gospel 21:33-46.

In both the song and the parable, neighbourliness does not exist. Selfishness and violence dominate any sense of love for neighbour and is quite contrary to the theme of stewardship that we focused on over the previous three Sundays.

The ten commandments/words in Exodus are received by those fleeing from slavery and now feeling lost in the Desert of Sin. How is a community to live when the routines and structures so familiar, even if oppressive, have been stripped away? These ten words are a guide to living in what Walter Brueggemann refers to as "neighbourliness". It stands in marked contrast to the communities described in O'Connor's song and in Jesus' parable.

Geoff named the theme for this Sunday's worship as "God: the best name we have for the mystery we do not know". On that basis, I wrote a small piece for the front page of the liturgy, exploring this God whom "we do not know". The meaning of words are slippery. What I might mean by the word "God" could be quite different to your understanding of that word. More than that, doctrines can be used to control and oppress.

I think that what the parable, the song and the ten words are pointing us toward is this. The nature of a 'god' of any community, religion or individual is revealed by their actions and by how they relate to one another, and in my view especially by how they relate to other communities, religions or individuals. Measure how a community or religion describe their 'god' against how they behave!!

A question to ponder:

Imagine the parable referring to our land Australia as the farm, and the colonisers as the tenants. Who or what might the "wealthy farmer" represent? What are the implications for how we are to relate to the land??

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